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SERMON CXXXVI.

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Preached on the Sixtieth Anniversary of his ministry at that place.

THE DOCTRINES ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION.

2 PETER, i. 12, 13, 14, 15.—*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavor that you may be able, after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.*

THIS day is peculiarly interesting, as it completes the sixtieth year of my ministerial labors in this place. Ten years ago I preached my half-century sermon, which was published at your request, and is probably in most of your houses. I now feel it proper to add some things, suggested by my advanced age, and the return of this anniversary. I am now the oldest officiating minister of the gospel in this state, or, as far as I can learn, in the United States. And I cannot learn, from the history of churches in Connecticut, that there has ever before been an instance of one of its ministers preaching for sixty years uninterruptedly to the same congregation; nor, during a life of eighty-three years, have I ever met with one who had preached the gospel of the grace of God to one and the same people for so long a period. This, therefore, is a singular instance; and the words selected for my text may be regarded as peculiarly appropriate to the occasion. In them, the apostle Peter informs those whom he addresses, that he was now advanced in age, but that he judged it to be his duty, as long as he continued in the world, to put them in remembrance of the great and essential doctrines of the Christian religion, which he calls "the present truth," as they were then, and always, equally important and necessary. He tells them that he expected

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soon to go the way of all the earth; and that he was anxious that after his decease they might rightly understand and invariably cleave to these essential principles, and never forget or depart from them. Placed in like circumstances, and affectionately desirous of your welfare, I propose in the present discourse,

Concisely to state and explain the essential doctrines of the gospel, and to commend them to your permanent and habitual remembrance.

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." The apostle Peter felt towards the essential doctrines of grace as all the truly pious do. He wished those to whom he wrote rightly to understand them, and to receive them in their hearts. He resolved that as long as he should be permitted to live, he would not cease—would not fail to state and explain and urge them on the conscience. And had these doctrines been always plainly urged, clearly taught, and solemnly presented to mankind, by the successors of the apostles, the world would have been comparatively free from gross error and religious contention, and the gospel gloriously triumphant. No preaching can be useful, or acceptable to that God "who will have all men come to the knowledge of the truth," which does not keep these essential doctrines in habitual remembrance. For a minister to neglect them for the indulgence of a fervid imagination, or the pride of learning and philosophy, is to treat with absolute contempt the message with which he is charged. "Preach the preaching that I bid thee," saith the Lord. These first principles of the oracles of God, Paul denominates "sound doctrine," and "the truth as it is in Jesus." The apostle Peter calls them "the present truth," and "the sincere milk of the word;" and the apostle Jude, "the faith once delivered to the saints." Our Lord himself calls them "the truth." Nor shall we be likely to mistake the mind of God, if we have that reverence for his authority which leads us directly, habitually, and prayerfully to his Word, and that love to souls which makes us willing and desirous to urge upon the conscience the known and established truths of God, rather than any original "inventions" or theories of our own. The apostles were not ambitious of novelties: they were not ashamed of the simple gospel with which they were charged—were not ashamed or negligent to put men in remembrance of its principles, though they already knew them, and were "established in the truth."

With such examples before me, I now proceed to state and explain what are the essential truths of the gospel, though they have been exhibited to you a thousand times; for I never preached a sermon to you in which they were not either expressed or implied. "And while I am in this tabernacle, I think it meet to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance of them."

The first which I shall notice, is *the fulness and sufficiency of the Scriptures, both as a rule of life and standard of faith.* If a merciful and gracious God should condescend to give us a revelation of his mind respecting our salvation, we might safely conclude, from his wisdom and benevolence, that he would give us a full and sufficient one; for a defective one would not answer for man, or be promotive of his own glory. We have, in the holy Scriptures, a perfect and infallible guide in the path of duty, and in the path to glory. Abraham is introduced by our Savior, in a beautiful par-

able, as arguing with the rich man, who was lifting up his eyes in torment, in the following manner, in respect to his brethren on earth—"They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one went from the dead." Our Savior says, "Blessed are they that hear the word of the Lord and keep it." The word of God, then, must be a perfect and infallible directory in the way to eternal life. It contains every doctrine we are to believe, every duty we are to perform, and every ordinance upon which we are to attend. Its very purpose is to build us up in holiness to a blessed immortality. Reason and conscience, or the light of nature, can teach us something of God and of duty, but cannot teach us the essential things of salvation. Natural religion, as far as it goes, is to be obeyed; but it is altogether defective in making known to us the most essential things concerning our salvation. For instance, the light of nature cannot teach us many of the attributes of God, or how he will be worshipped, or whether sin can be forgiven, or whether the soul be immortal, or whether there be a future world, or a Savior, or a day of judgment, or an everlasting heaven, or an eternal hell. But the Bible is explicit on all these points. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the prophecy of this book, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Another essential doctrine of the gospel respects *the being, attributes, and glory of God, together with the mode of his existence, purity of his laws, and wisdom of his government*. All creation proclaims, in a language which none need misunderstand, his being, and many of his attributes. He is the one, living, and true God, in opposition to all idols, which can neither see, nor hear, nor move, nor help. His own word, however, only reveals to us fully his true character, attributes, and glory. He is light, and in him is no darkness at all; the creator, preserver, and benefactor of all worlds. He is also the legislator, disposer, and judge of the universe; possessed of all possible perfections; worthy to be loved, to be feared, to be adored, to be admired, and chosen as a portion by all rational creatures. He may justly and equitably claim from us, on account of the infinite excellence of his nature, all possible expressions of obedience, the warmest affections of our hearts, the highest services of our lives, the sincerest praises of our tongues. Moreover, his Word states to us the peculiar mode of his existence, as *one God, in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*; and we never think rightly of him, unless we take into view this his peculiar mode of existence, and contemplate him as the triune God. And as God himself is infinitely glorious, so his law is infinitely just, and his government is infinitely wise and holy.

Another fundamental principle of the Christian religion is *the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ*. Christ must be divine in order to be qualified

to expiate the guilt of sin. He did every thing necessary to be done, and suffered every thing necessary to be suffered, in order to a full and perfect atonement, to honor God, to magnify the law, to sustain the government and authority of God, and to open an honorable door of salvation for the penitent, believing sinner. His blood cleanses from all sin, and his righteousness is perfect. Revelation tells us who Christ was, and what he did and suffered to save lost and perishing man. It tells us that he was truly God, as well as really man: and that his two natures, divine and human, constituted one mysterious person, in order that he might be a fit mediator between God and man. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." "Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." That he was truly God is proved from the following heads of argument:—The names proper and peculiar to God are given to him: the works proper and peculiar to God are said to be done by him: the attributes or perfections proper and peculiar to God only are ascribed to him: the worship peculiar and due to God only is given to him: and he is to judge the world. We conclude, therefore, if language has meaning, that he is truly and properly God, equally with the Father.

The *personality and divinity of the Holy Ghost* is also a fundamental principle of the Christian religion. That he is a person, and not an attribute of God, is plain from Scripture. Personal pronouns are applied to him: personal properties are ascribed to him: and personal actions described as being done by him. We have no better means of ascertaining, in any case, distinct personality. Those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity hold that the Holy Ghost, so often spoken of in Scripture, means only an attribute, and particularly the power of God. But, among others, two very plain declarations of the personality of the Holy Ghost, as well as of the Son, may be mentioned:—one, the apostolic benediction, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all;*" the other the form of Christian baptism, "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*" That the Holy Ghost is truly and properly God, as well as a distinct person in the Godhead, is most evident from the following arguments:—Attributes proper to God only are ascribed to him: names proper to God only are given to him: works proper to God only are said to be done by him: and worship due to God only is paid to him. I should not here have been so particular, had it not been a point of so much moment, in the Scripture scheme of salvation. A denial of the doctrine of the Trinity is a denial of what is most essential in the gospel. If there be no Holy Ghost, and no atonement by Jesus Christ, nothing of Christianity is left us, but mere morality. Renouncing these doctrines is resigning to the infidel all that is discriminating in the gospel.

The *Covenant of Redemption* is of high importance in the gospel of salvation. Foreseeing the apostacy of man, in infinite mercy, the Supreme Being provided a remedy. The covenant of redemption was formed between the persons of the adorable Trinity. God the Father, in this covenant, promises to give the Son a seed to serve him; God the Son undertakes to redeem and save lost man; and God the Holy Ghost covenants to apply the redemp-

tion provided: each person in the adorable Trinity has a part to perform in man's salvation. Hence we read, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And Christ says, "All that the Father hath given me, shall come to me: and him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out." And the Holy Spirit is given to call, enlighten, and sanctify: ~~this~~ regenerating influence is thus spoken of, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Another important doctrine of the oracles of God respects *the original state of man*. The first progenitors of the human race were created in holiness, and placed in an earthly paradise, in the garden of Eden. They were made holy in the image, and happy in the favor of their Maker. They were placed under the divine law, as a rule of life, and covenant of works. They were forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, on pain of death. They were put in a state of probation. Alas! how is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! Our first parents did partake of the interdicted fruit, and thus lost the image and favor of God. The terms of this covenant of works were—obey, and live; disobey, and die. Obey, and be happy; disobey and be miserable. They did disobey; and their apostacy brought mankind into a state of sin and misery. "By one man, sin entered into the world." "By the offence of ONE, (Adam and Eve being considered as ONE,) judgment came upon all men unto condemnation:—"by the disobedience of one many were made sinners:—"as in Adam all die."

The *present fallen state of man* is among the essential doctrines of revealed religion. All are involved in the ruins of the apostacy. All come into the world entirely depraved, in a moral and not a physical sense. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." "The wicked are estranged from the womb." "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh." "And were, by nature, children of wrath, even as others." "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."

A further essential principle of the gospel respects the nature and necessity of *regeneration by the Holy Ghost*. Regeneration, or the spiritual birth, lies at the foundation of all vital piety, and gospel holiness, and new obedience. Its nature consists in an entire change of heart, from sin to holiness, or from enmity against God to supreme love to him. Its nature does not consist in a mere reformation of morals—in doctrinal light—in baptismal washing—or excitement of the natural affections. No new faculty of soul is given in regeneration. The person, who is the happy subject of it, has the same rational powers and capacities of soul after, as before it; the same understanding, the same conscience, the same memory, the same judgment, the same will (considered as an essential power or faculty of the soul), the same animal affections. The change is a *moral* change. "A new heart," or disposition, is given. The change is instantaneous. No time is taken up in passing from death unto life. The "new heart" is given, not by man, but by the Holy Ghost. Truth, however plainly or scripturally presented, does not of itself regenerate the soul. Doctrinal light does not regenerate the soul. The sinner does not regenerate himself. "Which were born not of

blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In view of this passage of Scripture, one would think it impossible that any should conceive the sinner to regenerate himself, or that doctrinal light, or the strivings and prayers of others, should regenerate the sinner.

Another of the first principles of the oracles of God respects the *moral agency of man, his accountability to his Maker, and the immortality of the soul*. The Holy Spirit does not, in any of his operations, either in regeneration or progressive sanctification, break in upon the laws of moral agency. Moral agency consists in acting according to our choice and disposition, by motives. Man is a moral agent when he acts freely in the view of motives. A moral agent cannot be responsible for not putting forth exertions which are beyond the powers and capacities with which the author of his nature endowed him. Man has the natural powers and capacities requisite to perform all the duties required of him in both the first and second tables of the law; all that is wanting is a disposition of heart to comply. God treats him as a moral agent, and demands no more of him, than he has given him capacities to perform, were he rightly disposed towards God. Man is bound, by the laws of his rational existence, to love, adore, worship, fear, and serve his Maker; and nothing hinders him but wickedness of heart, or his "enmity against God." All who hear the gospel are bound by all possible obligations immediately to repent of all sin—to submit to God—to believe on his only-begotten Son—to lead a holy life—to be perfectly conformed to the divine will, and to do the whole of their duty, and nothing prevents but stubborn and wilful obstinacy of heart. We are accountable, as well as moral agents. And are to exist for ever. The soul is immortal. But he that made us, could alone tell us, whether we are to exist for ever or not.

That God's purposes reach to all events, in the natural and moral world, is another essential doctrine of the gospel. And all that ever will be saved are chosen from eternity to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth—are chosen that they may be holy. All that is included in the doctrine of divine eternal purposes, so much misapprehended, is, that God, infinitely wise and good, laid out his plan of government, over both the natural and moral world, and determined to do all things exactly right in all worlds, and works all things after the counsel of his own will. And the doctrine of election, which results from God's eternal purposes, so often misrepresented, is all included in these words of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonian converts, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." In the divine decrees and election, the means and the end always go together. But the venom of the natural heart is often strikingly displayed against these doctrines. And one peculiar mark of a sound conversion is a willingness that God should reign—that he should do as he pleases in all his universe.

The pardon of sin, and justification of the repenting, believing sinner, and adoption into the family of God, are among the important and essential principles of Christianity. These three doctrines I mention together, because intimately connected: for where there is the one, there also will be the other. Gospel pardon is only through the atoning blood of the Son of God.

and consists in an acquittal from condemnation. Gospel *justification* is the act of God, and is passed only through the righteousness of Christ received by faith. It is something more than pardon. It comprises the pardon of sin, reception into the favor of God, and a title to eternal life. *Adoption* is God's receiving us into his family, and numbering us with his children.

Further, it may be added, *supreme love to God*, a reverential *fear of him*, deep *repentance for all our sins*, *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*, and *new obedience*, are essential principles of the gospel scheme of salvation. Religion is a practical system; and everywhere requires holiness of heart and life. "Be ye holy, for I am holy," saith the Lord. The tree must be made good, and then the fruit will be good. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Why call ye me, says Christ, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Finally—Among the fundamental principles of the oracles of God may be enumerated the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, a heaven of glory for the righteous, and a hell of misery for the wicked, the institution of the Christian Sabbath, and a preached gospel, the duties of public and private devotion, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the means of grace generally.

The fundamental truths of revelation thus briefly sketched are all calculated to honor a God of infinite goodness, and to abase the pride of man; they consider and treat man as being what he is, a free moral agent. All departures from these doctrines are departures from the truth as it is in Jesus. I have made it the great object of my ministry to preach them, and to press them as a personal, practical concern on the conscience and on the heart. I now affectionately put you in remembrance of them, and fervently pray, "that you may be able after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance."

While these great truths of revelation have been habitually inculcated, and pressed upon your consideration, the influences of the Holy Ghost have been shed down upon you, as a church and society, in copious effusions. In this respect perhaps no church and people have had greater occasion for devout gratitude to God. We have been favored by him, as the great fountain of grace and mercy, with eight precious revivals of religion. In these revivals about five hundred have been made the trophies of sovereign and victorious grace; and in proper time, after enjoying a fit season to test the soundness of their hopes, have been admitted to the communion of the church. Besides these, about two hundred others, in the ordinary times of the gospel, have been received to the communion. Verily, our God is faithful to his promises. He has signally honored his truth in the midst of us. And in review, it becomes us to repeat with deep humility and fervent gratitude, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake." And now what more can I say to this people? "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." *Amen, and AMEN.*

SERMON CXXXVII.

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CONVICTION OF SIN BY THE LAW.

ROM. iii. 20.— *By the law is the knowledge of sin.*

No branch of knowledge can be more important to us than a knowledge of ourselves; and no part of self-knowledge is so important, and at the same time so difficult, as a knowledge of our sins. This kind of knowledge is difficult, because it is humiliating, mortifying, alarming, painful, and men turn away from it with aversion and dread. There are but a few, comparatively, who dare to look their sins in the face—who have courage to search them out, and trace them in their inevitable and interminable consequences. But this knowledge, of which so many are afraid, and to which they are so much averse, allow me to say, is of the *utmost importance*. A degree of it is as important, indeed, as is the conversion and salvation of the soul.

It is a common sentiment, that, in order to be converted, men must be first *convicted*; or that conviction, in the order of nature, precedes the turning of the heart to God. But what is conviction, but a full knowledge of our sins? The convicted person sees that he is a great sinner, a guilty lost creature, and justly exposed to be cast off for ever.

It is a common sentiment, that, in order to receive forgiveness and salvation, we must *repent* of our sins. But whoever repented of his sins before he came to a knowledge of them? We must first see ourselves to be vile, odious, ungrateful creatures, who have broken the best of laws, and unreasonably offended the best of beings; and under impressions such as these, the tear of penitence is made to flow.

It is a common sentiment, that, in order to be saved, we must be willing to accept of *mercy*, and even to beg for it. We must be willing to pray as the publican did, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But mercy and justice are very different things, and we shall never be willing to ask for the one, until we have ceased to depend on the other. Would you go to your neighbor, and ask him to relieve your necessities by giving you a small sum of money, while you held in your hand a just demand against him, the payment of which you might at any time enforce? No more will the sinner go to God and beg for mercy, until he sees—in the number and aggravation of his offences—that if justice takes its course with him, he is undone for ever.

It is the universal belief of Christians, that, in order to be saved by Christ, the sinner must be willing to come to him and embrace him as his Savior. But no person ever yet came to Christ, or was willing to come, until he felt that he needed him, and was undone without him; and no person ever felt this, or could feel it, until he saw himself to be a great sinner. "The whole

need not a physician, but they that are sick;" and while we fancy ourselves comparatively whole, in a hopeful state, in a good moral condition, we never shall apply to the great Physician of the soul for help.

These remarks are intended to show, that a knowledge of our sins (to a certain extent at least) is *indispensable* to our conversion and salvation; because without it, we shall never repent, never believe, and never seek or find that mercy which is promised in the gospel.

And it is important, not only for the unrenewed sinner to come to a knowledge and sense of his sins, but for the *Christian* also, who has been renewed, to cherish and retain a sense of his. He must not satisfy himself with reflecting that he has been once convicted, and once felt the burthen of his sins; he must feel this burthen daily, and the more deeply the better: for it is a truth, my brethren, and one worthy to be remembered, that *according as we cherish daily a sense of personal unworthiness and guilt, just in that proportion will every Christian grace rise and flourish in the soul.*

Who is that Christian, whose *love to God* will be the most ardent and constant? He, our Savior teaches us, to whom most has been forgiven. In other words, he who has the deepest sense of sin, and still hopes that his sins are forgiven—he will "*love most.*" And who is the most *humble* Christian? Who lies lowest at the feet of the Savior? And from whose eye does the tear of penitence most easily flow? From his, undoubtedly, who has the greatest sense of sin—who feels most deeply that he is a vile, unworthy creature, whose only dependence and hope are in the mercy of his Savior. And who is that believer whose *faith* is strongest—who clings most closely to Christ, and to whom his name is the most endearing and precious? He, undoubtedly, who is most sensible of his need of Christ—who feels most deeply that he is lost and undone without him. To such a one the Savior will indeed be precious. He will throw around him the arms of his faith, and nothing can separate him from his love. And who is that Christian who will feel most deeply, and pray most fervently, and labor most cheerfully and successfully for the salvation of others? He who has seen most of the plague and depravity of his own heart; who has been led to regard himself as guilty and undone, and to tremble in prospect of the coming wrath. With such views in relation to his own case, he looks abroad on the world around him, and sees it filled with creatures apostate and perishing, as he once was, but slumbering over the abyss of ruin, and taking no measures to effect their escape; and he *feels* for them,—he *prays* for them. Can he help it? He *knows* their situation, though they do not; and his "*spirits yearn o'er dying men.*" He is ready to do any thing, and to make any sacrifice, for their conversion and salvation.

Here, undoubtedly, was the secret of Paul's great engagedness and his untiring exertions. Paul learned, in his own heart, the hearts of others. He saw, in his own exposedness to ruin, the fearful exposure to which the world around him was subjected. With his eyes open upon this affecting subject, he felt his "*spirit stirred within him;*" and he hasted from city to city, and from land to land, proclaiming the gospel of the grace of God, that he "*might by any means save some.*"

In illustration of the remarks here made, on the connexion between a deep and abiding sense of sin, and a lively exercise of grace in the heart of the Christian, it will occur to you, that the most eminent saints, in all periods of

the church, have had the most humbling, abasing views of their own characters. Look at Job: "*Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" Look at David: "*I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight.*" Look at Isaiah: "*Wo is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*" Look also at Paul, that great exemplar of Christian attainment and experience: "I find," says he, "a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!*" "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom *I am chief.*" And from the days of Paul down to the present, the facts on this subject have been the same. Read the humbling confessions of Augustine, and you will see, in the abasing views which he entertained of himself, the living spring of his eminent piety. Read Bunyan's account of himself, appropriately entitled "Grace abounding to the chief of sinners;" and you will see how this holy man rose to that eminence in knowledge and grace, which fitted him to write his "*Pilgrim's Progress.*" Read the lives of such men as Brainerd, and Cowper, and John Newton, and Fuller, and Henry Martyn, and Samuel J. Mills; and you will find that they were not more distinguished for their piety, and zeal, and usefulness in the church, than they were for their deep, and often painful, and ever-abiding convictions of sin.

The immortal Edwards, whose spiritual attainments, probably, have not been exceeded upon earth, since the days of the apostle Paul, thus expresses the views which he entertained of himself years after his conversion: "My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and swallowing up all thought and imagination, like an infinite deluge, or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite." If this seems to any of you to be extravagant language, you will remember that it was used by one who, so far as the eyes of men could follow him, was a *pattern* of all the graces and virtues of the gospel. President Edwards was led to use this language respecting himself, not because he was more wicked than other men, but because he had seen farther into his depraved and deceitful heart than most other men; and the result of his deep humiliation was a proportionate *exaltation*, in every thing pertaining to the Christian character and life.

And if we look, my brethren, into our own churches, and investigate the religious history of those members who are the most uniformly devoted and engaged, those whose piety is *perennial*, we shall find, perhaps in every instance, that they are the persons who have had, and still have, the deepest sense of their own unworthiness and sinfulness. And this is precisely what we might expect to find. For, with these convictions of unworthiness and sinfulness, the Christian must be humble; he must be penitent; he must feel his need of Christ, and will cling to him; he will see that he has much to be forgiven, and will love much; he will see the odious nature of sin, and will watch and pray, and strive against it; and seeing the dangers to which

others around him are exposed, he will be willing to labor earnestly and perseveringly for their conversion and salvation. It is in this way that he who humbleth himself shall be exalted,—and that deep convictions of sin, after the heart is sanctified, are sure to result in eminent, distinguished piety and usefulness.

The preceding remarks are designed to show, first, to the unconverted sinner, and, secondly, to the believer, the great importance of coming to a thorough knowledge of their characters, and especially of their sins. To the sinner, a degree of this knowledge is as important as is the salvation of his soul; and to the believer, high and increasing degrees of it are *indispensable* to his growth in grace, and his spiritual improvement.

How, then, shall this knowledge be obtained? A most interesting question this, and one to which the language of the text is a direct and complete answer:—"BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN."

We are bound to believe this declaration of the apostle, not only because, like all other Scripture, it was given by inspiration of God, but because it was the language of his own experience. Paul could remember the time when, in his own estimation, he was morally whole and alive—when he was a boastful, self-righteous Pharisee. He thought himself as good as anybody, and better than most persons. His "hopes of heaven were firm and bright;" for he thought himself so nearly perfect, and God so merciful, that he was sure he had nothing to fear.

The reason of this delusion Paul has himself explained. He was "*without the law*." Not that he had no knowledge of the law of God, or did not consider himself as bound to obey it. He must have been well acquainted with the ten commandments, could probably repeat them as familiarly as the alphabet, and, like the other Pharisees, might have worn parts of them on his forehead, and wrists, and on the borders of his garments.* But he was without any proper spiritual understanding of the Divine law. He had never seen it in its great extent, strictness, and purity, and consequently had no idea of the number, magnitude, and turpitude of his transgressions of it. He was, in this sense, "alive without the law."

But Paul could also remember a season—the most interesting one in his whole moral existence—in which his views of himself were suddenly and totally changed. A sense of sin revived within him, and he found himself morally, spiritually dead. His good opinion of himself in a moment vanished; he awoke as from a delusive dream; his eyes were opened; and he saw himself to be in a state of complete moral death and ruin. The occasion of this surprising change, Paul has also himself explained. "*The commandment came*." When the commandment came home with light and power to his slumbering conscience; when the law of God was apprehended in its great extent, strictness, and purity; he saw at once how it was with him—he could be deceived no longer—he waked up to the dreadful reality of his condition—and the self-righteous Pharisee becomes, of a sudden, a mourning, weeping, trembling, and almost despairing penitent. Having experienced the effects of the law upon his own heart, in bringing him to a sense of his true character and condition, Paul was now prepared to guide and instruct others. He was able to tell awakened sinners how they might become convicted. He

* See Matt. xxiii. 5.

could say with an emphasis to inquirers of this sort, "*By the law is the knowledge of sin.*"

This declaration of the apostle is true to the letter. What is sin? "Sin," we are told, "*is a transgression of the law.*" Consequently, if there was no law, there could be no transgression; and if we had no knowledge of any law, we could never know how much we had transgressed it, or whether we had transgressed at all. And it is also true, that *the judgment which persons form respecting their own characters will always correspond to the ideas which they entertain of the law of God.*

Here is one man, who thinks that the sum of what God requires of him is to be just and honest in his intercourse with others; to discharge his outward, relative duties; to be a good neighbor, citizen, and friend; and so to conform to what may be called the decencies of social life, that those with whom he is connected may have no occasion to reproach him. Such are his ideas of the law of God; such his rule of life; and he endeavors to live up to it. And in a good degree, perhaps, he does. He *is* just in his intercourse with others; he does discharge his outward, relative duties; he is a good neighbor, citizen, and friend; and he so conforms to the decencies of life, that those associated with him have no great reason to find fault. He may not do all this constantly; he may come short in particular instances; but his failures are rather occasional than habitual, and not of a nature to give him trouble or alarm. Now, it is not possible for this man to be convicted, or to come to a knowledge of his sins, till he first learns that he has totally mistaken the law of God. With his present views of the law, how can he think himself a great sinner? He has a standard; he measures himself by it; and he almost, or altogether, comes up to it; and how can he be troubled respecting his sins? How can he but be whole and alive in his own opinion? How can he but consider himself as almost a perfect man? Alas! how many among us and around us are blinding and deceiving themselves, and dreaming away their probationary existence, under this fatal delusion! Ignorant of the law of God, and consequently and necessarily ignorant of their own characters and wants!

We may suppose another man, who has somewhat higher conceptions of the Divine law. He believes that, in addition to what has been stated, God requires of him a decent attention to the subject of religion: he must have a Bible, and must occasionally read it: he must pay some regard to the Sabbath; he must have a seat in the sanctuary, must assist in supporting some religious teacher, and (as often as is convenient) must go and listen to his instructions. On special occasions, or when he feels in a mood for it, he must even pray. Such are *his* ideas of the law of God; and he endeavors to live up to it, and he flatters himself, perhaps, that he does live up to it: for, in addition to relative and social duties, he does pay a decent outward respect to the services of religion; he does read his Bible, and attend public worship, more or less; he does pay some regard to the Sabbath; at times he does attempt to pray; and he thinks himself, not only a moral, but a *religious* man: he does his duty, as he understands it; is alive in his own opinion, and cannot think that he has any thing to fear. Now it is not possible that this man, more than the one last supposed, should be convinced of sin, or come to any just conceptions of his own character, until he opens his eyes upon the law of God. The difficulty with him may be, not that he does not measure himself by the standard he has adopted, but *he has a wrong standard*; and

hence, the more closely he applies it, the more danger, as it must inevitably, and in every instance, lead him to a wrong result. The case with this man is much as it was with the apostle previous to conversion; he is "alive, without the law;" and he needs to experience the same change with the holy apostle, and to have it accomplished by the same means. He needs *the commandment* to be set home upon him, that a sense of sin may be revived in his heart, and he may see himself to be spiritually dead. He needs first to understand *the law*, that he may come to a knowledge of his sins.

Still further to illustrate the principle under consideration, and show how, under all circumstances, the views which persons entertain of themselves correspond with those which they have of the law, we may suppose another case: it is that of a man who believes that God requires something more of his creatures than mere forms; that he has enjoined a *spiritual* religion; one involving a change of the affections, demanding a degree of separation from the world, and conferring on those who enjoy it much mental peace; and to the possession of this inestimable treasure he trusts he has attained. He has passed through a process of what he conceives to be awakening and conversion; has made a public profession of his faith; feels that he has done, and is doing, all that is necessary; and is for the most part well satisfied with himself and with his prospects. Of course he feels none of that deep humiliation and self-loathing which characterized the experience of Job, and David, and Isaiah, and Paul, and can hardly account for the painful anxieties and humbling confessions of some eminent Christians in modern times; but he thinks he understands what religion is, endeavors to live up to its requisitions, discovers but few remaining deficiencies, and is not often disquieted on account of his sins. It would be superfluous for me to say, that I consider this man's experience altogether spurious and deceptive. The case has been introduced for the purpose of showing how inadequate views of the Divine law may lead to unfounded hopes, and to a false and Pharisaical peace, not only in the mere formalist, but in those who profess to believe, and to be interested, in experimental godliness. Indeed, the danger of deception at this point is as great, to say the least, as at any other; and false hopes entertained here may be even more difficult to be dispelled than those which are founded on grosser conceptions of the nature of the Divine requirements. They cannot be dispelled in either case, until the law of God comes home with light and power to the slumbering conscience, and effectually teaches the deluded subject of them that he is "dead in trespasses and sins."

What is the law of God, of which so much has been here said? A plain question this, and a vitally important one. *What is the law of God?* The following passages may be said to comprise the whole of it:—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do; do all to the glory of God." "Wherefore glorify God, in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." These are specimens of the Divine law—comprehensive specimens—which may in truth be said to comprise it all. And whoever considers them attentively, candidly, and seriously, must perceive, in a moment, that they comprise very much. In comparison with such a law, what are external relative duties, the customs and decencies of social life? and what is a decent outward respect to the services

of religion? No more, my friends, than a drop to the ocean! No more than an indivisible point is to the immensity of space! That holy law, which the Psalmist describes as "exceeding broad," spreads all over performances such as these, and covers and swallows them all up. We must *love God*, at all times, in all places, and with all the heart. We must fear and serve him, and him *only*, constantly and for ever. We must glorify him in all our faculties of body and of soul, so that whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do,—even the most common actions of life, such as eating, and drinking, and ministering to our bodily necessities,—*all* must be done to the glory of God. This is the standard by which we are to decide upon our characters here, and according to which we must be judged in the future world. We cannot alter it if we would; for it is immutable as the eternal throne. Heaven and earth might sooner pass away, than one jot or tittle be taken from this holy law. We may spin out as many theories, and frame as many inventions, as we please; they are all as things of naught, and can never supersede, for a moment, the holy and unchangeable law of God.

Let, then, the man who is living upon his relative and social duties, and superficial observances, and thus laying the flattering unction to his soul—let him throw away the false standards of character which he has adopted, take the rule which God has given him, and faithfully apply it. The application may cause him pain and alarm, but let him not shrink back. He must come to this rule sooner or later, and he had better come honestly to it in season. "True," he may say to himself, "I have endeavored to be just and honest in my intercourse with others; I have the reputation of being a good neighbor, and a good member of society; I have even assumed the Christian profession and name;—but is this *all* that God requires of me? This is all I have to offer;—is it enough? The Divine law, I find, reaches to the heart; and it becomes me carefully to look within, and see what has been passing there. Has the love of *God* reigned within me; or the love of *self* and the *world*? Have I been serving *God*, or *myself*? Has it been my habitual, predominating purpose to glorify God, or to promote my own supposed interest and happiness? In all I have done, have I kept God in view, and acted from a regard to his authority and glory? Or have I not often forgotten him, thought little of him, and lived much as though there was no such Being?"

Let the self-righteous and self-confident deal with themselves after this manner, taking the holy law of God as it stands, and fearlessly and faithfully applying it to their souls; and they cannot long be altogether blinded in respect to their true characters. "The commandment of the Lord is pure, *enlightening the eyes*;" and if they take it and use it as they ought, it will, it must enlighten them. They will soon see how the case stands with them. In the great *extent* of the Divine requirements, reaching to the thoughts, the affections, to all the secret springs of action, and requiring that the *love of God* move and direct all; the sinner will see the number and extent of his transgressions. He will see ten thousand things to be sin, which he never supposed were sin before. His transgressions will rise up to view one after another, till, like black and gloomy clouds, they completely overwhelm him. He will find them to be, like the stars in the sky, or the sands on the ocean shore, innumerable.

In the inviolable *strictness* of God's law, and in the awful sanctions by

which it is enforced, he will see that not one of these innumerable transgressions is a trifle. Every sin he has committed is a great sin, imposing a debt which he cannot cancel, imprinting a stain upon the soul which he cannot wash away. What, then, he may well exclaim, is the amount of them *all* ! What the insupportable burthen which they all impose ! What the crimson stains imprinted by them all !

In the perfect *purity* and *propriety* of the law of God, the convicted sinner will come at length to see, that his sins are as base and detestable as they are numerous and great. He is not only ruined and lost, but guilty and vile. He cannot now bear a view of his own character. With humbled Job, he begins to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Bring now *the Savior* before this weeping, trembling, relenting, though almost despairing penitent ; let in a ray of light from Calvary upon his dark, and troubled, and tossed soul ; and Oh how he will catch it ! With what earnestness and gratitude will he greet it ! It will be to him as life, from the dead ! He feels now his *need* of a Savior—his perishing need ; he sees the Savior presented to be just what he needs ; and with emotions unutterable he casts himself upon his mighty arm. And can it otherwise be than that the Savior, thus embraced, will be precious to him ? precious incomparably beyond all others ?

The inimitable Cowper relates, that for months after his conversion, he could not speak or bear the name of Jesus without weeping. The very mention of this precious name would at once melt him into a flood of tears. And, my friends, there was no enthusiasm in this. Why should he not weep ? And why should not every Christian weep, when he thinks of the dying love of Jesus, and of his own infinite *indebtedness* to this bleeding love ? Why should not every Christian weep, when he thinks from what merited degradation and misery he has been delivered, and to what glorious hopes and prospects he (an unworthy sinner) has been exalted, through the sacrifice and sufferings of a bleeding Savior ?

The subject to which we have attended is one of great interest and importance in its application to several classes of persons ; and, in the first place, to *professing Christians*. Would you, my brethren, be engaged, active, growing, useful Christians ? Do you desire and pray, that your love may be ardent, and your repentance deep, and your faith strong, and your zeal constant, and your hopes substantial ? You will then cultivate an intimate and thorough acquaintance with your own hearts. And in order to this, you will look into them often, in the clear light of *God's holy law*. Remember that this is your standard ; carry it always with you ; apply it frequently, and apply it with an unsparring hand. Thus, you will see, and feel, and lament your deficiencies. You will grow in a knowledge of your sins. And growing in this important knowledge, you will grow in every thing which stands connected with it ; will grow in humility, grow in penitence, grow in faith, grow in love, and in all the graces and virtues of the Christian. Your course will thus be triumphant and happy, while you press onward and mount upward in your preparation for eternal rest.

There may be some present who have been aroused from carnal security—in whose minds the slumbers of sin have been broken—but who think that they are not yet sufficiently convinced of sin, and have not that deep and painful sense of it which is necessary, in order to their conversion and salva-

tion: This subject, my friends, addresses itself to you. If you need more deep and thorough convictions, you here see how they are to be obtained. Acquaint yourselves fully with the law of God. Study it, think of it, understand it, and measure and judge yourselves by it. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." If you have not yet come to a knowledge of your sins, it is because you have not tried yourselves faithfully, and by the proper standard. You have not yet searched your deceitful hearts to the bottom, and brought home the commandment with light and power. Begin now, to deal more faithfully with yourselves. Be willing to know the worst of your case. And humbly implore the Divine Spirit to search you as with candles, and set your sins in order before your eyes.

There may be those present—it would be strange if there were not—whose sins have never given them any trouble, and who feel no concern respecting the future destiny of their souls. They have endeavored to live decently—have never done any thing which they think very criminal—consider themselves as good as their neighbors—and why should they be troubled or afraid? Just so, my friends, the apostle reasoned and comforted himself in his state of blindness and stupidity, while he was "alive without the law." He regarded himself as very moral, very religious; and who had more reason to hope than he? But you will remember, that if Paul had not become an altered man—if he had lived and died in this state of formality, he must inevitably have perished. So he judged himself afterward, and do not think me uncharitable when I say, that unless you become very different persons from what you are at present—unless you wake up to new views respecting your character and wants, you too must perish. For, secure and blinded in your sins, feeling in no need of a Savior, spurning at the offers of his bleeding love, and trusting to the works of your own hands—how can you expect *salvation*, on the ground of the gospel? How shall you be brought to repentance, while you feel that you have done little or nothing to repent of? And how shall you come to Christ for help, or entreat his mercy, while you do not feel that you need the one or the other? What remains, then, persisting in your present course, but that you must flatter and dream life away, and never awake to the reality of your condition, till you wake up in eternity?

But why persist in the course you are now pursuing? Why not begin to think, reflect, and be wise in season? Why not awake *now*? Why not take the holy rule which God has given you, apply it to your deceitful hearts, and bring out the result? Such a trial, if faithfully undertaken and accomplished, may terrify and distress you, but it cannot injure you. It may, and it will, destroy all your carnal peace; but this peace must be destroyed, before that peace of God, which passeth all understanding, can be the portion of your souls. It will open your eyes to new views of your character, destiny, and wants, and will lead you to pray, as the beggar did, "*Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.*" And the moment you utter this prayer in truth and sincerity, that Jesus who had mercy on the imploring beggar will doubtless have mercy upon you. He will wipe away your tears, and wash out your sins, and comfort you with consolations of which the world are ignorant. "The law of the Lord is perfect, *converting the soul*; the testimony of the Lord is sure, *making wise the simple*; the statutes of the Lord are right, *rejoicing the heart.*"